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# June 2017 (Issue 1) : How to Prevent Childhood Obesity

Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi

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## HOW TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Childhood obesity is on the rise, not only in the developed world, but in the developing countries in Asia as well. Educating parents is important for slowing this trend down. Some of the strategies mentioned below may help with keeping the excess weight in check.

### READ THE LABEL FOR PROCESSED FOODS

Always read the nutrition fact column when buying any food product off the shelf. This information describes how many calories are present per serving and the food content, including the types of sugars, amount of fibre and quantity of salt.

### MONITOR INTAKE OF ADDED SUGARS

Words like glucose, maltose, fructose and corn syrup, indicate that sugar is present in the product in some form. FDA has recently enforced the labels to show these terms as "added sugars". While natural forms of sugars would be mentioned as fruits extracts or dried fruits, keeping track of the added sugar is very important as its consumption leads to obesity.

### START EARLY WITH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Introduce fruits and vegetables in soft forms within the first year of a child's life. Avoid serving these with sugar or salt so that the child gets familiarized with the natural taste.

### READY TO USE WEANING FOODS

The first solid food at the age of six months should be natural food like a banana or homemade cereals etc., instead of something out of the box. The processed foods expose children to a high dose of added sugars and preservatives very early in life which steers the body towards obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

### PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Technology is encouraging children to lose focus on physical activity. Parents should encourage children to be physically active and limit their use of digital devices. 25 to 30 minutes of daily continuous activity is sufficient for children.

### GOOD NUTRITION STARTS AT HOME

- Avoid ready to use pasta with taste enhancer available commonly as it has high amounts of sodium and bad starch. Make your own pasta dishes using lots of vegetable and minimum salt.
- Avoid soft drinks as they are full of calories and sugar and offer no nutrients to the body.
- Try to avoid preservatives and artificial food colors as much as possible.
- Pack homemade lunchboxes with generous servings of fruits and vegetables.
- Do not reward any positive activity or celebrate with junk food; this will form a positive association with the consumption of junk food.



References:

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The Aga Khan University Hospital

